

## Overpopulation of Whitetail Deer

White tailed deer are hunted as a prized trophy for many sportsmen and hunters across the nation. How then can overpopulation of deer be a concern? First we will look at the negative effects of an abundant population of deer and then we'll explore why deer are becoming overpopulated and what things can be done in order to correct this.

Overpopulation of white tailed deer can have many negative consequences on an area. From an ecological stand point deer feed on sapling shoots and small plants. This prohibits the growth of new forest trees and plants. With too many white tailed deer the age of wooded areas can increase. Their effects on human life is also quite prevalent. White tailed deer will eat many different species of plants and can damage farming crop yields. White tailed deer also harbor ticks which are the primary transporter of Lyme disease. Lyme disease is not only detrimental to human health by causing potential neurological damage and severe joint pain but it can lead to death in some breeds of dogs. With an abundance of white tailed deer in an area some are forced into more populated areas. As deer move into more populated areas there are more and more car accidents involving deer. There are around one million car accidents with white tailed deer each year, two hundred result in human fatalities and ten thousand in personal injuries. These accidents cause almost one billion dollars in damage per year. ("Deer-car collisions increase this time of year," n.d.)

What is causing these explosions in whitetail deer population? These growths in population are caused by several things. One factor that is largely responsible for a booming population is the development of exurban and suburban communities. These communities fragment the natural habitat of native animals and cause predators such as coyotes, mountain lions, wolves, and bobcats to either die or be displaced. Without natural predators these robust animals thrive and flourish while the land they inhabit is decimated. Another problem in the control of whitetail deer populations is trophy buck hunting. While hunting would seemingly help to reduce whitetail deer populations, trophy hunting in particular does little to help keep populations stable. Male deer have the potential to mate with up to twenty does in a year as measured in penned conditions. ("HowStuffWorks "Does deer hunting reduce car accidents?," n.d.) This means that by killing a buck there are likely other bucks in that area that can step in.

So what can be done to resolve these issues? As far as hunting goes, targeting does is one way to help control the population. Many states issue more doe tags than buck tags for this reason. By targeting does, you ensure a reduction in the reproduction cycle. In residential areas where hunting may not be an option or in cases where you prefer not to kill the animals you can ward whitetails from your property by planting vegetation that deer specifically do not like. Another nonlethal method that was tested in 1997 is a contraceptive called porcine zona pellucida or PZP. This test showed that annual birth rates were reduced by 72 percent. While effective these methods tend to be more costly and difficult to implement. So long as humans continue their expansion into the wild habitats across the nation issues like these will continue to be present.

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